



Disaster and Emergency Management Resources

Introduction to Terrorism

Definitions

- **Terrorism** is the use of force or violence against persons or property in violation of the criminal laws of the United States for purposes of intimidation, coercion, or ransom. Terrorists often use threats to create fear among the public, to try to convince citizens that their government is powerless to prevent terrorism, and to get immediate publicity for their causes.
- **Domestic terrorism** involves groups or individuals whose terrorist activities are directed at elements of our government or population without foreign direction.
- **International terrorism** involves groups or individuals whose terrorist activities are foreign-based and/or directed by countries or groups outside the United States or whose activities transcend national boundaries.
- **Biological agents** are infectious microbes or toxins used to produce illness or death in people, animals, or plants. Biological agents can be dispersed as aerosols or airborne particles. Terrorists may use biological agents to contaminate food or water because these agents are extremely difficult to detect.
- **Chemical agents** kill or incapacitate people, destroy livestock, or ravage crops. Some chemical agents are odorless and tasteless and are difficult to detect. They can have an immediate effect (a few seconds to a few minutes) or a delayed effect (several hours to several days).

Facts about Terrorism

- Before the September 11, 2001, attacks in New York and on the Pentagon, most terrorist incidents in the United States had been bombing attacks, involving detonated and undetonated explosive devices, tear gas, and pipe and fire bombs.
- The effects of terrorism can vary significantly from loss of life and injuries to property damage and disruptions in services such as electricity, water supply, public transportation, and communications.

- One way the federal, state, and local governments attempt to reduce our vulnerability to terrorist incidents is by increasing security at airports and other public facilities. The U.S. government also works with other countries to limit the sources of support for terrorism.
- The Department of Defense estimates that as many as 26 nations may possess chemical agents or weapons and an additional 12 may be seeking to develop them.
- The Central Intelligence Agency reports that at least 10 countries are believed to possess or be conducting research on biological agents for weaponization.
- A terrorist attack can take several forms. Bombings have been the most frequently used terrorist method in the United States. Other possibilities include an attack at transportation facilities, an attack against utilities or other public services, or an incident involving chemical or biological agents.
- Terrorists look for visible targets where they can avoid detection before or after an attack such as international airports, large cities, major international events, resorts, and high-profile landmarks.

Terrorism Warnings

The U.S. Attorney General and the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security set the threat level. The threat level is reviewed every 24 hours to determine whether it should be changed.

Low Condition (Green). This condition is declared when there is a low risk of terrorist attacks.

- *Government's Role* – Train personnel on the Homeland Security Advisory System and ensure all facilities and regulated sectors are regularly assessed for vulnerabilities to terrorist attacks.
- *Individual's Role* – Develop a family disaster plan and supply kit. (See Sections 2.1 – 2.4)

Guarded Condition (Blue). This condition is declared when there is a general risk of terrorist attacks. In addition to the protective measures taken in the previous threat level:

- *Government's Role* – Review and update communication and emergency response procedures and provide the public with information that would strengthen its ability to act appropriately.
- *Individual's Role* – Update disaster supply kit and review household disaster plan; perhaps develop a more detailed household communication plan.

Elevated Condition (Yellow). An Elevated Condition is declared when there is a significant risk of terrorist attacks. In addition to the protective measures taken in the previous threat:

- *Government's Role* – Increase surveillance of critical locations ; implement, as appropriate, contingency and emergency response plans.
- *Individual's Role* – Be observant of suspicious activity and report it to authorities; become familiar with school emergency plans and how children are to be reunited with their families; update the household communication plan.

High Condition (Orange). A High Condition is declared when there is a high risk of terrorist attacks. In addition to the protective measures taken in the previous threat level:

- *Government's Role* – Coordinate necessary security efforts with federal, state, and local law enforcement; take additional precautions at public events and facilities and restrict access if necessary.
- *Individual's Role* – Review preparedness measures for potential terrorist actions including chemical, biological, and radiological attacks; exercise caution when traveling.

Severe Condition (Red). A Severe Condition reflects a severe risk of terrorist attacks. Under most circumstances, the protective measures for a Severe Condition are not intended to be sustained for substantial periods.

- *Government's Role* – Increase or redirect personnel to address critical emergency needs; mobilize specially trained teams or resources; monitor, redirect, or constrain transportation systems; close public and government facilities not critical for continuity of essential operations.
- *Individual's Role* – Avoid public gathering places that could be high-risk locations; follow official instructions regarding high-risk locations; contact employer to determine status of work; listen to the radio or TV for possible advisories or warnings; prepare to take protective actions if instructed.

Adapted from resource material developed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the US Department of Homeland Security